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KARGIL CONFLICT-1999

The Kargil Conflict was fought in high altitude mountains of Ladakh. This region is sparsely populated and it consists of diverse religious, linguistic and ethnic groups in one of the world's highest mountains. India and Pakistan fought for Jammu and Kashmir in 1947-1948 and the battle ended with the cease fire line which bisects the Baltistan district. Kargil was on the Indian Territory in the Ladakh subdivision of Jammu and Kashmir. Both India and Pakistan went to war in 1965 and 1971. This was the fourth conflict after independence. Previous this time Pakistan had sent infiltrators on the quiet who occupied important heights in the mountains. It become necessary to evict them from the heights.



Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- highlight the geographical location of Kargil and the Genesis of the conflict;
- describe the operations carried out by the Indian Armed Forces during the conflict;
- discuss the role of Indian Media, and responses given by the world and
- discuss the comments of the Kargil Review Committee.

20.1 Terrain of the Conflict Zone

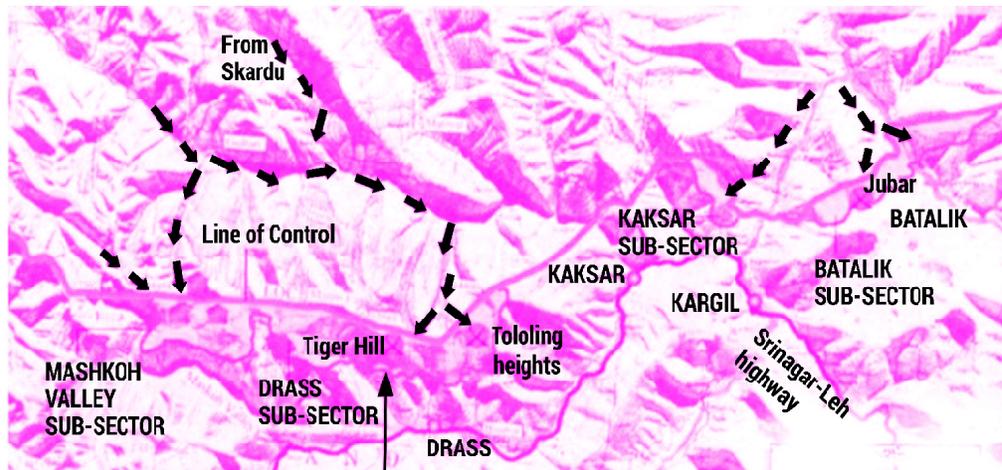
What is Terrain?

We use the word Terrain to describe land. For example terrain is mountainous, terrain is plains etc.

Major Wars Post Independence



Note



Map 20.1 Kargil Mountains where Kargil war took place.

See the map above and identify the places marked. This was called the ‘*Conflict Zone*’ and includes the Mushko Valley, Drass, Batalik sector, Kaksar, Tololing heights, Tiger Hill, Southwest and Northeast of Kargil. Strategically the area enjoys a high ground which would give advantages to the defending force and increase difficulties to the attacker. Sitting on these heights one can see the towns of Drass and Kargil below. Kargil is 788 km from Pakistan controlled town of Skardu. The average heights of the mountains in Kargil are 16000 ft and the winter temperature can go upto -48 C.

Pakistan had trained and covertly sent Pakistani troops and paramilitary forces, under the disguise of Mujahedeen along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kargil Sector for monitoring and gathering information of the Indian movement in the LoC. Such infiltration was code named “Operation Badr”. Their main aim was to force Indian Forces to withdraw from the Siachen Glacier and to cut off Ladakh region and internationalise the Kashmir issue so as to have a speedy resolution.

20.1.1 Background

During 1998, several intrusions were carried out by the Pakistani sides in the places of Mushkon Valley, Marpo La near Drass, Kaksar near Kargil, Chorbata sector and Turtok sector south of the Siachen area. The reason behind Pakistan reoccupying the India post in the LoC was to dominate the towns of Kargil and Drass, internationalise the Siachen glacier and Kashmir issue. In Batalik sector, an attack was carried out by the enemy troops over the Indian army who were on routine patrolling duty, under the team led by Capt. Saurabh Kalia.



Intext Questions

20.1

1. Where is Kargil situated?
2. At what height is Kargil situated and what is the minimum temperature of that area in winters?

3. What was the main cause for the of Kargil War ?
4. Who crossed the LOC in Operation Al Badr?

20.2 Operation Vijay

There were three major phases to the Kargil War.

- First, Pakistan infiltrated forces into the Indian-controlled section of Kashmir and occupied strategic locations. This enabled it to bring the road connecting Drass and Kargil within range of its artillery fire. See fig. 20.1. This is how the Pakistan army infiltrated and occupied the heights of Kargil. Pakistan called its operation Al Badar.
 - The next stage consisted of India discovering the infiltration and mobilising forces to respond to it.
 - The final stage involved major battles by Indian and Pakistani forces resulting in India recapturing the territories held by Pakistani forces and the subsequent withdrawal of Pakistani forces back across the Line of Control.
- 1) In military terms ‘Operation Vijay’ was a limited conflict with 2 to 3 Divisions involved on both sides. Apart from keeping the plan top secret, the Pakistan Army also undertook certain steps to maintain surprise and deception.
 - 2) Unlike other similar high altitude areas, the Kargil Mountains lose snow cover rapidly as the summer progresses. Below the peaks and the ridgelines are loose rocks, which make climbing extremely difficult. The movement of the troops is slow, labourious and time consuming.
 - 3) The Intruders on the heights were a mixture of professional soldiers and mercenaries. They included the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 12th battalions of some Pakistan Army’s Northern Light Infantry (NLI). Among them were some Mujahideen and members of Pakistan’s Special Services Group (SSG). It was initially estimated that there were about 500 to 1,000 intruders occupying the heights but later it was estimated that the actual strength of the intruders may have been about 5,000.
 - 4) The infiltrators, apart from being equipped with small arms (rifles and machine guns) and grenade launchers, were also armed with mortars, artillery and anti-aircraft guns. Many posts were also heavily mined.



Intext Questions

20.2

1. Which were the areas that Pakistan occupied prior to the Kargil War ?
2. What was the name for military operation carried out by the Indian Forces to remove Pakistani Forces from Kargil.



Note

Major Wars Post Independence



Note

20.2.1 Indian Army Operations

- (a) The Indian Army detected the intrusions between May 3 and May 12, 1999. Strategic planning for operations was carried out by the Indian Army from May 15 to May 25, 1999. Such activities included military operations, troops movement, artillery and other equipment were moved in and the necessary equipment was also purchased from friendly countries. On May 26, 1999, Indian Army carried out offensive action named Operation VIJAY to evict the Pakistani intruders.
- (b) Indian troops moved towards Pakistani occupied positions with air cover provided by aircraft and helicopters. However IAF was ordered not to cross the LOC as India did not want to enlarge the scope of war. A joint Infantry-Artillery battle with air cover was launched on regular Pakistani soldiers of the Northern Light Infantry (NLI) who occupied high altitude mountain peaks and ridgelines. Indian troops deployed firepower that could destroy the intruders.
- (c) About, 250 artillery guns fired on enemy positions to clear the infiltrators. The Bofors FH-77B field howitzer played a vital role in this operation. An innovative tactics was employment for Artillery firepower in battle. A massive exchange of fire broke out between the two groups. Three hundred Artillery guns, mortars and rocket launchers fired approximately 5000 shells, rockets and bombs on a daily basis at the enemy.
- (d) Indian army used the 155 mm Bofors medium guns and 105 mm guns and prevented the enemy from interfering with the assault. The Artillery fire was so devastating that the Army captured Tiger Hill and Point 4875 on July 5, Mashkoh Valley on July 7, 1999. The Indian Army renamed the Point 4875 as "Gun Hill" in honour of the stupendous performance of the Gunners in the Drass and Mashkoh sub-sectors.
- (e) Tiger Hill was bombed with high explosives which caused large-scale death and devastation and the Indian Artillery fired their 122 mm Grad multi-barrel rocket launchers (MBRLs). These were employed in the direct firing role audaciously without regard for personal safety. Even such incidents of the guns firing were telecast in full view of TV cameras and the nation watched in rapt attention for the first time in history of independent India.
- (f) In the Batalik sector despite heavy casualties the Artillery OPs were established on dominating heights. Another victory was added when Indian forces recaptured Point 5203 and Khalubar on 21 June and July 6 respectively. With the effective use of artillery guns by India, the Pakistani forces started suffering casualties and their moral went down.
- (g) Firepower played a significant role in weakening the Pakistani defences, destroying its battalion and headquarters and mainly the logistics supplies. In the

Kargil war the Indian troops fired over 250, 000 shells, bombs and rockets, i.e. 5,000 shells, mortar bombs and rockets daily.

20.2.2 Role of Indian Air Force

The IAF launched an operation called ‘Operation Safed Sagar’ to support the ground troops during the war. Such role was limited due to the weather condition, high altitude, limited bomb loads and less number of airstrips. As the terrain in the Kargil area is at 16,000 to 18,000 feet above sea level, it needs well trained personal and special aircrafts.

On May 27, the MiG-27 flown by Flt Lt Nachiketa, while attacking a target in Batalik sector, developed an engine trouble and he had to bailout. Sqn Ldr Ajay Ahuja, in a MiG-21, went out of the way to locate the downed pilot and in the process was hit by a Pakistani surface- to-air missile (SAM).

He ejected safely but his body bearing gun wounds was returned subsequently by Pakistan. The state-of-the-art Mirage-2000s along with Mig -29 were used for electronic warfare, reconnaissance and ground attack carrying free-fall bombs. It also fired the laser-guided bomb with deadly effects causing considerable destruction to Pakistani bunkers on the ridges at Tiger Hill and Muntho Dhalo. In the Mirage attack on MunthoDhalo, 180 Pakistani troops were killed.



Intext Questions

20.3

1. When did the Indian Army detect intrusions in Kargil?
2. What was the artillery used by the Indian Army against Pakistani Posts?
3. What were the aircrafts used by the Indian Air Force during the Kargil War ?

20.2.3 Role of Indian Navy

The Indian Navy blocked the Pakistani ports near Karachi to cut off the supply routes. The Navy was clear that a reply to the Pakistani misadventure had to be two-pronged. It was decided by Naval Head Quarters that all efforts must be made to deter Pakistan from escalating the conflict into a full scale. From May 20 onwards the Indian Navy was on full alert for launch of the naval retaliatory offensive. Thus, Naval and Coast Guard aircraft were put on a continuous surveillance and the units readied. Rapid reaction missile boats and ships from the fleet were deployed in the North Arabian Sea for carrying out missile firing, anti-submarine and electronic warfare.

Sea Harrier aircrafts can take off vertically and do not need a runway. In ‘Operation Talwar’, the ‘Eastern Fleet’ joined the ‘Western Naval Fleet’ and blocked the Arabian sea routes of Pakistan. Later, the Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif disclosed that the country was left with just six days of fuel to sustain itself if a full-fledged war had broken out. This also means that our strategy of blocking the port of Karachi worked.

**Note**

Major Wars Post Independence



Note

20.2.4 American Intervention during Kargil Conflict

During the outbreak of war, Pakistan asked American help in de-escalating the conflict. On June 18, the G-8 group of the world's leading industrial nations met at Cologne in Germany, and asked Pakistan to stop the aggression on the LoC and resume talks with India. The American President, Bill Clinton refused to intervene until Pakistani troops were fully withdrawn from the Indian side of the Line of Control. On July 4, Pakistan Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, agreed to remove all his troops and most of the fighting came to a gradual halt, while some troops remained in the LoC. The United Jihad Council rejected Pakistan plan for a withdrawal and instead decided to fight on independently. The victory is celebrated as *Kargil Vijay Diwas* on 26th July every year (Kargil Victory Day) in India. India resumed its control of all territory which was established in July 1972 as per the Shimla Agreement.

The World community criticised Pakistan for instigating the war, as both the Pakistan paramilitary forces and insurgents crossed the Line of Control. Pakistan tries to justify the world community but its diplomatic stance found few backers on the world stage.



Activity

20.1

Search the internet and write a paragraph on United Jihad Council.

20.3 Role of Indian Media during Kargil Conflict

During the Kargil War, the war stories and war footage were often telecast in Television and many websites provided deep analysis of the war to the public. This conflict was the first “live” war in South Asia with detailed media coverage. News papers and TV channels were allowed to be in Kargil and allowed to cover war live. Some other activities related to the media, which the Indian Government under took were as listed below:

- a) The Indian government placed a temporary news ban on Pakistan, banning the telecast of the state-run Pakistani Channel PTV and blocking access to online editions of the *Dawn* newspaper. In turn Pakistan criticized India on curbing the freedom of press in India. Indian media claimed that the government action was in the interest of National Security.
- b) The Indian media ran stories in foreign publications including *The Times* and *The Washington Post*, with creditable details of Pakistan's role in supporting the extremists in Kashmir.

Media coverage of the conflict was more intense in India than in Pakistan as war progressed. Indian channels showed images from the battle zone in a style similar to the coverage of the Gulf War by CNN (An American News Channel). Reasons behind the increased coverage were because Indian Government gave opportunity to the

media to cover the war live. India has greater number of privately owned electronic media as compared to Pakistan with freedom to report. Pakistan journalists agreed in a seminar in Karachi that the Indian government had taken the press and the people into its confidence. According to some analysts, Indian media was both larger in number and more credible which may have acted as a force multiplier for the Indian military operations in Kargil and served as a morale booster.

20.4 The Kargil Review Committee (KRC)

After the war was over the Prime Minister of India Atal Bihari Vajipayee set up an inquiry about the causes of Indian intelligence failures. The committee was to identify weaknesses in the organisation of the Armed Forces and suggest remedial measures. The Committee had, K. Subrahmanyam (Chairman), Lieutenant General (Retd.) K.K. Hazari, B.G. Verghese and Satish Chandra, Secretary, National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) who was also designated as Member-Secretary. The Committee's findings are based primarily on official documents, authenticated records and copies of documents. The report was not an investigation into what happened at Kargil, but a review of the developments and recommendations as to the measures to be undertaken to prevent such an occurrence in future. The report also gave for reaching recommendation to restructure our security set up.

You have studied about the number of wars fought by India after independence. Other than these wars that you have studied, Indian Army has fought bravely in a number of other places. In Siachen glacier, the Army had to occupy some posts at very high altitudes in extreme cold temperatures because Pakistanis were trying to occupy the area illegally. Similarly our Army was sent to Sri Lanka in 1987 to help the Sri Lankan Government battle the LTTE. In both these areas our soldiers fought with great valour and were awarded the highest gallantry award the Param Vir Chakra. Find out the names of the soldiers who were awarded the PVC in this war.



Intext Questions

20.4

1. What was the duration of the Kargil war?
2. Who were the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan during the kargil war?
3. Name the American President during the Kargil War.



What You Have Learnt

- The causes of the Kargil War and its strategic importance.
- The deployment of army, Role of Airforce and Navy, the role played by the Indian Media, and the responses from other nations.
- The lessons learnt by both India and Pakistan.
- Lastly, the formation of Kargil Review committee.


Note

Major Wars Post Independence



Note



Terminal Exercises

1. Write a short note about “Operation Vijay” by the Indian Army in 1999?
2. What is Kargil Review Committee? Describe in brief.
3. Summarize the significant role played by Indian Media during the Kargil war.



Answer to Intext Questions

20.1

1. Kargil is located in the state of Jammu and Kashmir at a distance of 205 Km from Srinagar and facing towards the Northern Areas of the Line of Control.
2. Average height is 16000 ft and winter temperature touch -50 Celsius.
3. The main aim of Pakistan behind initiating the Kargil War was to make Indian Forces to withdraw from the Siachen Glacier and to create tension in this region and also internationalise the Kashmir issue for a speedy resolution.
4. Pakistan troops and Para military forces.

20.2

1. Mushkon Valley, Marpo La near Drass, Kaksar near Kargil, Chorbatla sector and Turtok sector south of the Siachen area.
2. Operation VIJAY.

20.3

1. May 3 to May 12, 1999.
2. Indian army used the 155 mm Bofors medium guns and 105 mm guns.
3. Mig 21, Mig 27, Mig 29 and Mirage 2000.

20.4

1. 26 May to 05 Jul 1999.
2. A.B. Vajpayee and Nawaz Shariff
3. Bill Clinton.

